



Town of Collingwood Community Engagement Action Plan

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What We Heard	3
What Engagement Means	6
When to Engage	8
Levels of Engagement	9
Engagement Level Guide	11
Measuring Success	11
Desired Outcomes	12

Introduction

Effective engagement makes our community better. It encourages participation, action, personal responsibility, Town accountability, and democracy. It allows the municipal government to hear from those who live, work or play in Collingwood and ensure decisions are informed by community needs and aspirations. Engagement also helps ensure those impacted by decisions are informed, understand the process and how they may be affected or how they will benefit.

The ultimate goal of all community engagement is to help improve Town programs and services, and the overall quality of life in our Town.

This Action Plan is the foundation for how the Town of Collingwood engages with residents and stakeholders. It guides engagement efforts and demonstrates the Town's commitment to engaging the community in meaningful and effective ways. For Town staff who initiate and plan engagement, this Action Plan is supported by a step-by-step toolkit to ensure service areas approach engagement thoughtfully and consistently.

The Action Plan and the Toolkit are based on current municipal and leading industry best practices and trends. They are also informed by input from Town staff, Council and the Collingwood community as described below.

What We Heard

To develop this Community Engagement Action Plan, we gathered feedback from Town staff, Council, and community members in the following ways:

- In-person engagement session at Sunset Point Park.
- In-person engagement session at the Collingwood Youth Centre.
- Discussions with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Discussions with the Unity Collective.
- Two virtual engagement group sessions.
- Interactive online survey hosted at engage.collingwood.ca.
- Town booth at the Collingwood Downtown Farmers' Market two Saturdays in September 2023.
- Long-form and short-form paper survey available at the in-person session and Farmers' Market.
- Kick-off meeting with Mayor, CAO, Communications Team and Consultants.
- Questionnaire for Town Council.

Key Themes

Recognition that the Town of Collingwood cares about engagement. Most of those who provided feedback around the Community Engagement Action Plan recognize that public engagement is a priority for the Town and that opportunities are available to provide feedback.

Expectation of transparency throughout the process. When people take time to participate in engagement opportunities, they want to feel like their input is valued. It's important to be clear about what is being decided by the Town and the step-by-step process to make the decision.

Different engagement formats appeal to different people. With busy schedules, community members are looking for convenient ways to get involved. For some, an early evening meeting on a weeknight is preferable. For others, an online survey or lunchtime virtual engagement works best. Offering many choices for engagement is important to residents.

Communicate how feedback informed the decision. The end of a public meeting shouldn't be the end of the engagement process. People want to know how their feedback was used, or not used, to make the decision. The Town should report back to the people who participated, including providing updates when the final decision has been reached.

Community participation plays a key role in successful engagement. Most of those who provided feedback felt that it is important, or somewhat important, to participate in public engagement initiatives with the Town. They also recognize that residents have a responsibility to stay informed and stay involved.

Include diverse voices in engagement initiatives. The Town should reach out to groups that may not be highly engaged, including young people, young families with busy schedules, seniors, and community groups representing businesses and other areas.

Staff and Council have a role to play outside of formal engagement opportunities. People desire timely, honest, and accurate responses to questions posed to staff and Council outside of formal engagement processes. Without a ward system (or "assigned Council member"), it was conveyed that it can be challenging for residents to determine which Council member to approach on a matter, making it even more important to take an organized and proactive approach to responding to resident questions. Participants also shared that they appreciate staff and Council presence at community events, such as the Farmers' Market, as it gives them an opportunity to learn and ask questions.

"Engagement of the public should be reflected in the decision."

“Community members have a responsibility to stay informed and stay involved.”

Top ways people give feedback:



Online survey



In-person meetings



Talking to a member of Council



Town booth at Farmers' Market

Top ways people learn about engagement opportunities:



Local media



Social media



Word of mouth



Email notification

When thinking about past engagement initiatives, **56%** of those surveyed believe that the process was somewhat meaningful.¹

Top reasons people are discouraged from participating in engagement opportunities:



Don't hear about opportunities



Don't feel informed about the issue



Time is not convenient



Location is not convenient

¹Based on 124 survey responses received in September 2023.

“Ideal engagement means having an honest discussion and listening carefully to input from a variety of sources.”

What Engagement Means

No one knows better what is needed for our community than those of us who live here, work here, and play here. The purpose of engagement is to gather perspectives for decision makers, not to make decisions. It means that the Town of Collingwood talks to our communities before making decisions. It means that if you have concerns or ideas about improving the quality of life and services in Collingwood, we want to talk to you about them.

The purpose of engagement is to gather perspectives for decision makers, not to make decisions.

What Engagement Does Not Mean

While the Town will endeavour to ensure that all residents' feedback is taken into consideration through public engagement, it is not possible to satisfy the opinion of every participant in final recommendations and/or decisions. Engagement does not mean that everyone in our diverse community will always agree on decisions that are made within the Town.



We will listen to different opinions and use them to inform the decision-making process, in a fair and balanced way.

Goal: facilitate more informed and inclusive municipal decision-making.

Town Beliefs and Guiding Principles for Engagement

Beliefs

The Town believes and understands that effective engagement with the community can:

- ✓ Increase community trust/support in local government and value for taxpayer dollars
- ✓ Inform programs and services
- ✓ Build a more informed community and create a shared purpose
- ✓ Empower participants and give greater ownership
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for diverse voices
- ✓ Promote collaboration and cooperation
- ✓ Reduce issues from becoming larger problems

Guiding principles for engagement

The Town commits to the following guiding principles when engaging the community:

- **Honest and transparent:** The Town will be clear about what decision is being made, and the process to get there.
- **Timely access to information:** The Town will share information often and in a variety of formats about proposed developments, policies, initiatives, and municipal projects, offering a variety of ways to provide input.
- **Open and inclusive:** Everyone has the right to participate in the Town's community engagement initiatives, and the Town will seek input from diverse stakeholder groups.
- **Expectation of respect:** Town will emphasize and model a welcoming, respectful environment for all engagement.
- **Feedback loop:** the Town will inform the community and stakeholders about how their input was considered and adopted or why it was not adopted.
- **Continuous improvement:** Public engagement activities will be regularly evaluated and improved.

Citizen rights

Community engagement is rooted in the notion that citizens have the right to have an informed say in decisions that affect their lives, the right to access information from their local government, and the right to transparent and open government that provides them opportunities for engagement.

Role of the community

Along with citizen rights come responsibilities. Citizens who choose to participate in local decision making, can meet their responsibilities by:

- ✓ making themselves aware of community issues
- ✓ asking questions to learn more about community issues
- ✓ sharing feedback, offering ideas, suggestions and alternative solutions to Town staff and Members of Council when necessary and appropriate
- ✓ participating in engagement opportunities on matters of interest
- ✓ collaborating with fellow participants, the facilitator, Council and Town employees to find solutions

Guidelines for participation

Effective engagement is a two-way street and requires mutual respect of all participants, including citizens, staff, and members of council.

All participants need to be aware of, and agree to, the following guidelines at the beginning of any public engagement process:

- ✓ Be respectful of all participants;
- ✓ Listen and be open to all ideas;
- ✓ Show consideration and value for another person's point of view;
- ✓ Adhere to the established process and time frame;
- ✓ Changing the engagement process during a session only by group decision, if necessary;
- ✓ Allow everyone the opportunity to speak;
- ✓ Allow people to speak without interruption;
- ✓ Try to include everyone who is willing to participate; and
- ✓ Turn cell phones off/mute.

Guidelines for participation will be visible where appropriate at public engagement sessions.

When to Engage

Community engagement will be used as much as possible and where appropriate to inform the Town's major initiatives, programs, and services. The level of engagement will vary based on the topic or project and level of community impact. Staff will use an internal engagement planning toolkit which defines the appropriate approach for community engagement.

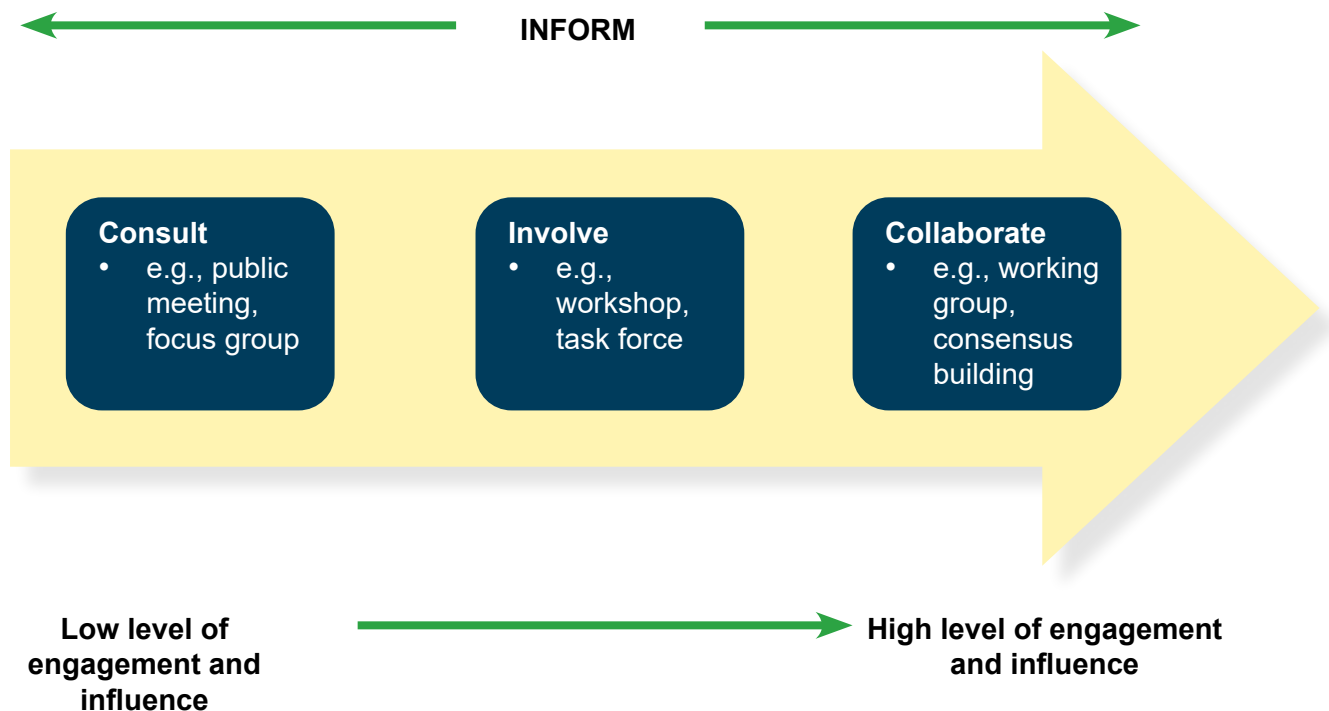
The following list details opportunities when the Town will seek the community's input:

- To inform decisions or actions that are forecasted to have significant community interest, or projects/initiatives that are at a very high risk of creating community uncertainty.
- To help identify community needs and aspirations.
- When several members of the community have raised or expressed an interest **and** their input has the ability to inform or impact the decision.
- When required by resolution, law, policy or agreement.

Levels of Engagement: A Continuum

Not all topics, projects or initiatives require the same level of engagement. Initiatives that will have a high degree of community impact should, in turn, have greater public engagement and input.

As the Town of Collingwood plans engagement, staff will follow this Action Plan and the accompanying toolkit to determine the appropriate level of engagement on the following continuum. For each level, the Town will ensure the community has opportunities to be fully informed and aware of the issue and options being considered.



Adapted from [IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum](#)

Consult

Goal: To gather:

- Reaction or feedback on Town analysis, alternatives and / or recommendations
- Input to improve an event or Town experience or if an initiative /project should proceed.
- Suggestions for how the Town should proceed

Town's responsibility

- Provide sufficient information to allow for informed suggestions and commentary
- Provide opportunities and time for meaningful public input
- Take the public's feedback into account when making the final decision
- Report back how the feedback was used

Common tools (examples only)

- Survey
- Focus group
- Public meeting

Involve

Goal: To work directly with the community throughout the engagement process to ensure that input, including concerns and aspirations, are understood and considered.

Town's responsibility

- Provide information and opportunities to share feedback, including concerns and aspirations.
- Ensure that concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed.
- Report back on how community input influenced the decision.

Common tools (examples only)

- Workshops
- Task Force

Collaborate

Goal: To ensure the public voice is represented in the decision-making process; allow the public suggestions to benefit from the experience of Town staff; work together to arrive at a mutually agreeable decision.

Town's responsibility

- Provide information and the opportunity to participate in forming the proposed solutions by sharing views, ideas and setting priorities.
- Work with subject matter experts and focused groups.
- Consider recommendations.
- Report back to participants and ensure the public understands how the process was undertaken and the input used.

Common tools (examples only)

- Workshops
- Citizen Advisory Committees
- Meetings with existing groups

High-level Impact Assessment and Engagement Level Guide:

The following chart is a high-level guide only. The exact level of engagement needed for each Town initiative will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and will depend on the impacted audiences, their current understanding and level of concern, and their ability to influence the decision.

Community Impact	Ability to impact the decision	Level of Engagement	Target Minimum Timeframe to Provide Input
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium to high priority • Routine • Limited area or audience 	Low to medium	Consult	14 days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium to high priority • Limited to broad area or audience • Somewhat controversial or high profile 	Medium	Consult / Involve	28 days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High priority • Controversial or high profile • Town wide 	Medium to high	Involve / Collaborate	42 days

While best efforts will be made to go above and beyond legislative/regulatory requirements, to the extent of any conflict that may exist between this Community Engagement Action Plan and applicable legislation/regulation that governs consultation timelines, formats, circulation, notice or other requirements, legislation/regulation will prevail.

Measuring Success

Taking time to assess the effectiveness of community engagement is a critical step to ongoing success and meeting the goal of a meaningful two-way process, where participants feel their contributions were valued.

Key questions during evaluation include, but are not limited to:

- Did the process make a difference?
- Did the municipality benefit?
- Were participants satisfied with the experience – from initiation to reporting back?
- What worked or didn't work?
- What lessons can be learned for future engagement?

Regardless of the approach, taking time to assess the Town's efforts will help achieve a goal of continuous improvement.

Desired Outcomes

1. Consistent use of this Action Plan by Town staff to inform engagement plans and approach.
2. Participant satisfaction related to how well the engagement was designed and implemented.
3. Engagement outcomes from the process: considerations and recommendations made by Council and how effectively the loop is closed, and feedback, process, and end results are communicated.
4. Engagement having a real impact on local decisions, policies and actions (was the ultimate decision different or made better by the input?).
5. The community has the information, trust and increased capacity to participate and be involved: increasing numbers in future engagements, having a strong level of repeat individuals who engage.



